

8/27/07

*Edited Transcript of Assemblymember John Laird's floor speech during debate on SB 924, the Iraq War Ballot Measure*

Thank you madam speaker. I think this has been a great debate. It's been a democratic debate and it's what the issue is all about—which is, whether we're going to have faith in democracy. There are a few false choices that have been offered here today and I just can't let a couple of them pass. As the son of someone who was in a General Patton army in Europe, and the nephew of many people who were in the south pacific, there's no one on this floor who believes we shouldn't have been in World War II, and we shouldn't have fought fascism, and we shouldn't have fought Hitler, and we shouldn't have fought what went on in the pacific. Period. The end.

I think it's a false choice about some of the things that were said about children here today because nobody on this floor supports a child being used as a shield for terrorism—just as I would hope nobody on this floor believes a child should lack health insurance, something that is in part a result of (federal) priorities that are going on right now. I think the central point of this debate...is that power in our democracy is rooted in the people. And are we going to trust the people to weigh in with their opinion on this? And it's kind of hard to say that we really believe in the wisdom of the people when they send us (legislators) here...but jeez, we have questions when they might vote on other major issues—I think it is the same thing. And to argue that this is a federal issue, when we would be putting this to a vote of the people who also elect our senators and congressmembers, is also a false choice.

We are having the people who fund the government and send our national representatives their (vote) on this issue. I think there's an interesting thing happening now in the Assembly because we're at this point where there's a few of us who are in the class that was elected in 2002 who are the only ones that were here when we had a debate on this war, on this floor, before we went into the war—at a time when going to war was a popular move to make.

And 52 people of this legislature signed a letter that said in its major points that there was not anywhere near a reasonable doubt on the issue of weapons of mass destruction and the case about WMD hadn't been made. And that we had failed to have other nations significantly back our intentions. And that there was a lack of clarity (in the mission). And we didn't know about the instability that would result in the Middle East and Iraq if we went in. And, in fact, that we would see budgets at the federal level that would reflect back on state and local governments because of the priorities (made about the war). We said those things here (in the Assembly).

And we were attacked on this floor for not backing the commander in chief. It was the attack that was brought against us (here) all the way through. And the interesting point in this whole debate is “you're just doing this because it's popular.” Well, the 52 of us who signed that letter made the point that history has proven right, when it was *unpopular*. Because in a democratic society, that's what you have to do. And it was said (today), “let history be the judge.” I, too, agree with that. But let history be the judge of what we did on one of the most profound moral questions of our time during that time when we have a chance to impact it.

So I really believe that the debate (today) shows a good democracy. We are rooted...our power...the power of the people, by the people and for the people that that man (Abraham Lincoln) up there in the painting (in the Assembly chamber) said, is what we are returning to if we ask the people to weigh in on the greatest debate of our time. I think it's appropriate. I ask for an aye vote.